

Kalamazoo Public Schools

Michael F. Rice, Ph.D.
Superintendent

Office of the Superintendent
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December 6, 2016

Re: Opposition to SB 279 and 280

Dear Members of the House Commerce and Trade Committee:

I am writing in strong opposition to Senate Bills 279 and 280 associated with the prohibition of (a) any retirement service credit for release time and (b) the bargaining of, and payment by the employer for, release time.

The Kalamazoo Public Schools (KPS) have more than 13,000 pre-K-12 students this year, our largest enrollment since 1980 and the 12th largest district in the state. In the last 11 years, we have grown by 2,455 students (24 percent), the largest growth in the state during this period. Most importantly, we have rising student achievement during the last several years.

KPS students are 42 percent African American, 37 percent white, 12 percent Latino, 6 percent multiethnic, 2 percent Asian American, and 1 percent Native American. During the last seven years, we have averaged free/reduced-price lunch eligibility of 69 percent. We have more than 1,600 special needs students, almost 1,000 English language learners, and more than 700 students identified as homeless. We have approximately 800 teachers and other staff members in our teachers' association.

Release time has historically served our district well. It has been an efficient, effective, and economical way to collaborate on a whole range of issues important to running schools and serving school children. In KPS, release time has been used to work on the following efforts, among others, over the last several years:

- Staff professional development
- New teacher orientation
- New teacher development
- Mentors for new teachers
- Development of a new high school schedule
- Development of a new middle school schedule
- Input on the teacher evaluation process
- Annual calendar
- Middle school and high school boundaries
- Capital projects planning
- Additional efforts to improve student achievement, including but not limited to work on the district's hiring processes, curriculum development, and instructional methods
- Problem-solving/grievance resolution

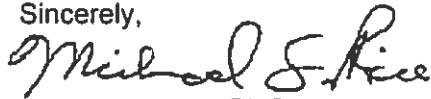
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KPS has used compensated release time for many years. Since 2007, when I became superintendent in Kalamazoo, I have worked effectively with two union presidents—Millie Lambert and Amanda Miller—to provide service to students, families, and staff. It has been a local decision, one that has helped minimize disruption to education and improve educational results for children at the same time. It needs to continue to be a local decision.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (269) 337-0123.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael F. Rice". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michael" and last name "Rice" clearly legible.

Michael F. Rice, Ph.D.
Superintendent

C: Board Members
Committee Clerk Angie Lake
Amanda Miller
Millie Lambert